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lory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favor" (Luke 2:14).

This Christmas again we hear the angels' message of peace on earth. This Christmas again we look on the newborn child in the manger and recognize the Prince of Peace. I am deeply concerned that all of us understand what the peace of Christ means and what we must do about it.

For we do, in fact, continue to believe that Christ is the Prince of Peace promised long ago (Is. 9:6). The child whose birthday we celebrate is a symbol of the deepest longing of the human heart, the longing for what the Jewish people called shalom, *peace. This Hebrew word, rich in meaning, implies perfect fulfillment, happiness and well-being. It suggests harmony, that total harmony within a community which vibrates with God's blessings and provides a rich soil for human growth. Peace, as the Israelites understood it, went far beyond the mere*

(Text continued on page 294)

A PASTORAL LETTER

† CARROLL T. DOZIER, BISHOP OF MEMPHIS

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NEWS & VIEWS

For Want of Pupils . . .

The enrollment problems of the select secular prep school would seem to be catching up with the select Catholic boarding and day school, if the experience of one religious order is typical.

A year ago, the *Wall Street Journal* surveyed prep schools such as Kent, Choate, Hotchkiss and others that once could pick and choose from among applicants. All were suffering enrollment losses.

The past fortnight, the Religious of the Sacred Heart announced that they were closing six boarding and day schools in four states. One of four reasons for the decision: poor enrollment potential.

The private, exclusive school apparently does not have the social and educational appeal of old for Catholics either.

Being closed in June by the Religious of the Sacred Heart are elementary and high schools at Portsmouth, R.I., and El Cajon, Calif., and high schools at St. Charles, Mo., and Noroton, Conn. The Noroton school occupies 11 acres at the tip of a peninsula that juts into Long Island Sound; the property includes a large Georgian-style main house, tennis courts, chapel and gymnasium, and has been valued by realtors at $2.6 million.

Other reasons dictating the nuns' decision: finances, limited "growth potential" of the area where the school is located, and a need to "consolidate" the order's diminishing strength.

Berriganiana

The Thomas More Medal for the "most distinguished contribution to Catholic literature in 1971" is going to one of the country's best-known prisoners: Father Daniel Berrigan.

Berrigan is being honored for *The Dark Night of Resistance* (Doubleday), a book written during the four months when he was a fugitive from the FBI.

The book has not been the critical success that other Berrigan books have, but the Thomas More Association makes no pretension to be honoring the work alone. Said its announcement:

"We are honoring Daniel Berrigan as poet and writer . . . But it is, in this instance, difficult to separate the man's actions from the man's writing, since the words and deeds focus and join at the same point to illuminate the 'dark night' of both a personal and national crisis. Father Berrigan's writing is a cry of conscience and of humanity; his life is a witness to the challenging words with which he both indicts and prophesies. Such words and actions do not come cheaply—Father Berrigan is paying dearly for them and in bestowing this literary award we wish to acknowledge their great value to us all."

Speaking of Daniel Berrigan, a book by two of his colleagues at Catonsville is being made into a movie: *Whose Heaven, Whose Earth?* (Knopf), by Marjorie and Thomas Melville. Production will begin next spring in Latin America, with Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland in the lead roles.

The book is based on the Melvilles' experiences as missionaries in Guatemala, and is capped by their reasoning for joining in the Catonsville action.

Dan Berrigan's play, *The Trial of the Catonsville 9*, went into film production last month in Hollywood.

French Catholicism

The problem, it seems, is the same the world around.

Ernest Milcent, editor-in-chief of *Informations Catholiques Internationales*, writes of the perplexity of French parents over the drift of their children from the church, and how these parents find it difficult "to admit that the message of the Gospel—on which they have built their own experience—has become incomprehensible to their children."

The problem is traced back in *Informations* to the failure of church leaders to transmit the message of Christ in such a way that the new generations can receive it and live it, and their failure to seize opportunities, such as that presented by the recent Synod.

A letter from one set of parents is reprinted as a kind of summation of parental anguish and assessment of blame:

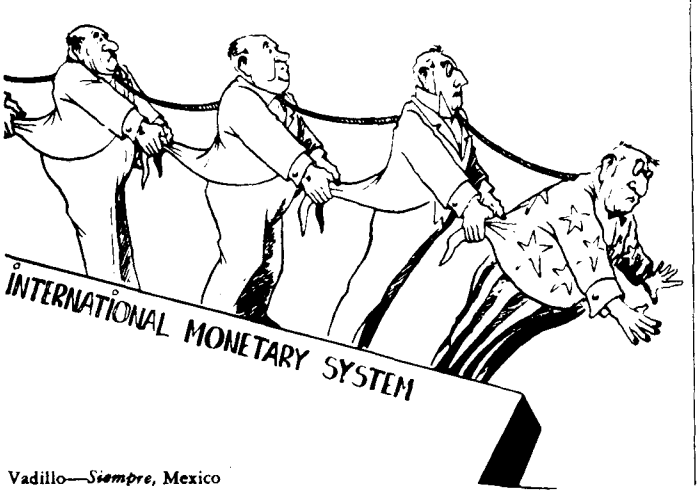
"My husband and I are dismayed by the conclusions of this Synod, which is so weighted with consequences for our French Catholicism. We are both faithful churchgoers *(très pratiquants)*, Christians by love and conviction. We have brought up our children in this atmosphere of sincere faith. And now we see our four daughters little by little turn away from the church. Doubtless we hope that they will retain a love of, and faith in, God, but after the great hope from the Council, seeing the rebirth of all the old disgraceful conservatism, they have gradually given up practically all religious practice. It is so grievous to us to see that no matter what we do, our young people, disillusioned by our church, are silently leaving it that we can only cry out in our confusion. And it is up to you to do so as you are doubtless read by the authorities. . . ."

Odds and Ends

—A note from *Visión*, newsletter for businessmen dealing with Latin America: "In both the Congress and the Nixon Administration, domestic economic (and political) needs seem to have made Latin America expendable. Treasury Secretary Connally, now the chief economic spokesman for the President, is horrendously candid about his view of hemisphere affairs: 'The United States can afford to be tough with Latin America,' he says, 'because we have no friends left there anymore.'" Lots of implications in that statement.

—Sad note of another sort: *I. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly* will be discontinued as of the first of the year. Stone declared that at 64 he no longer feels he can carry on as a one-man newspaper and kind of one-man ombudsman. "The compulsion to cover the universe in four pages has become too heavy a burden." Thus the close of one of the brightest chapters in individual American journalism since Isaiah Thomas. But Stone won't be gone completely from print; he'll be writing for *The New York Review of Books* as a contributing editor. That's the good news for this week.

JOHN DEEDY



Vadillo—*Siempre*, Mexico

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CORRESPONDENCE

L'Affaire Prattleback

Corpus Christi, Tex.

To the Editors: With his obvious command of the *non sequitur* (even though he isn't Groucho Marx), your reviewer J. Arthur Prattleback [Nov. 12] should probably be better employing his talents writing Nixonite disclaimers for the harrowing of Daniel Schorr.

When that job is done, he might profitably spend the rest of his life writing weekly revised drafts of the *Lex Fundamentalis* for Cardinal Felici.

My God—what if he *is* Cardinal Felici?

RALPH THIBODEAU

Pleasantville, N.Y.

To the Editors: I write to protest vigorously your erroneous "biographical note" about me in your November 12 number.

I do not esteem Woody Allen, nor do I "review x-rated films for *Reader's Digest*," a puerile conceit.

Wrong on two out of three points. On the third, partially wrong, which is not bad, one imagines, for advocacy journalism. No, I was not a member of "the 1941 Olympic Chess Team," although I did spend some part of the subsequent year instructing Bobby Fischer's mother in natural childbirth methods, which doubtless accounts for much that has followed.

J. ARTHUR PRATTLEBACK

P.S. And need it be added, I did not write that oxymoronic review, and insist that you print a clarification. *The* J. Arthur Prattleback is not the author of such gabble.

REPLY: Although Mr. Prattleback's letter comes duly mailed from Pleasantville, N.Y., and postmarked "People have faith in *Reader's Digest*," no return address was affixed which would allow us to clear up the confusion.

Our correspondent's complaint is by no means oxymoronic. It is simply contradictory. If Mr. Prattleback did not

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SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

"Are there no prisons? . . . And the Union workhouses? . . . Are they still in operation? . . . The treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigor, then? . . . I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there."

Everyone knows that Ebenezer Scrooge was a skinflint—"a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner"—and what would you expect from a man who didn't love Christmas except the sort of judgment cited above? What does it have to do with us, who love Christmas, who enjoy the Dickens' tale precisely because we know in our hearts that *we* are not Scrooge, that we wouldn't starve the Cratchits or let Tiny Tim go without proper medical care?

But, in that passage at least, Ebenezer Scrooge was more than a miserly individual. He was the caricature of a social philosophy, of an attitude toward the poor which had infected a significant segment of the ruling class and the thinking fraternity in that age of industry and Chartists. It was an attitude which prided itself on being unsentimental, even cold-blooded if necessary—"Stick to facts, sir!" cries the paragon of utilitarianism Thomas Gradgrind in Dickens' *Hard Times*—and which Dickens detested. One hundred and thirty years later, that attitude is still with us, and in the form of current "get tough" campaigns directed against the welfare poor, it may even be growing. The problem, naturally, is not so simple as a holiday fable would make it. Indeed, it was not so simple in Dickens' time either, in the England of the "Hungry Forties." The tough-minded social philosophers who erected the workhouses as their monument to charity were responding to the breakdown of traditional relief systems, and they must be credited with certain reforms as well as with legitimating the practices of the Bounderbys and Scrooges. So too the appeals we hear today for "benign neglect" and for restoring discipline to the poor through work or close supervision are responses to a real problem. They are sometimes tied to genuine reform proposals—but they run a terrible risk of simply ending up as justification for hard-heartedness.

Peace, the poor, children—these are three of the themes most traditionally associated with Christmas, and the latter two of them were fortuitously linked in the bill to extend the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, es-

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tablish a National Legal Services Corporation, and initiate a large-scale child care program. President Nixon vetoed this bill, objecting to the lack of "accountability" in the legal services segment and to several aspects of the child-care program. Mr. Nixon, we hasten to say, did not merely exclaim "Bah, humbug!" in his veto message, but put forth some arguments worth discussing. The overall implication of a government commitment to child-care, as it relates to changes in family patterns and possible public policy, has certainly been an under-discussed topic. The problems of administrative bureaucracy and qualified staffing have probably not received the attention they deserve from many advocates of day-care programs, especially in light of recent, sad experience with urban school systems.

What compels one to read the President's veto in something less than a philosophical spirit, however, is the Administration's own record in assisting the poor. Does concern about "accountability" only translate into fear of the aggressiveness young legal services attorneys have displayed in backing the poor against political interests? Does the President's concern for the "family-weakening" characteristics of the child-care program extend to his own day-care proposals connected with welfare reform? Will "parental authority and parental involvement with children" get so much emphasis when it is a matter of requiring welfare recipients to take jobs and leave their offspring in day-care centers? The fact is that five million American mothers with pre-school children are now working; many of them must do so; others are encouraged to do so by the pressures of our economy. The Congress's bill—with the counsel of the Administration—limited free care to lower-income levels. It was partially a response to the plight of the hard-pressed working woman, and as such was strongly supported by the AFL-CIO. It was meant to prevent child care from becoming a service identified with welfare and therefore afflicted with a concentration of problems and want of public respect and support. The bill had its shortcomings, but not as many as the minimalist alternative of the Administration. We've come a distance from Scrooge—but not far enough.

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GENESIS, EXODUS AND WOMEN'S LIB

BEYOND SEXUAL POLITICS

November 1971 was a seminal month for women in the church —and I use the adjective advisedly with full knowledge of its etymology. In Boston Mary Daly delivered the first sermon given by a woman in Harvard's Memorial Church. When she finished she led a goodly number of women and men out of the church in a symbolic "exodus from sexist religion." Outside she explained: "We haven't left anything . . . the church has left the modern world."

At almost the same time, at Graymoor, New York, an ecumenical retreat house now become almost the motherhouse (here again my word-choice is careful) of thought on liberation of women in the church, a two-day interconfessional conference was held under the optimistic title: Beyond Sexual Politics: Women's Liberation Today. To it came such well-known theorists of the movement as Rosemary Ruether (*The Church Against Itself* and *The Radical Kingdom*) and Sally Cunneen, an editor of *Cross Currents,* as well as lesser known, vigorous activists like Rena Hansen, feminist leader of St. Clement's Church in New York and Sara Doely, brilliant young editor of *Women's Liberation and the Church.*

Last spring, of the meeting in the same pleasant, rural quarters, on the Sexual Revolution and the Church (*Commonweal*, April 30, 1971) I reported that more than 80 persons jammed in to hear speakers on such subjects as the deteriorating concept of family and the "new" sexual mores of the young. Many of those present were men, and two of four speakers were of that "chauvinist" stripe. The year before, in the same meeting rooms, an even larger gathering had mulled over the role of women in the church (*Commonweal*, Dec. 11, '70).

This year the Friars announced their conference would be limited to 80 persons to permit greater participation by everyone attending—and found themselves hosts to less than forty. Of these, in contrast to earlier gatherings, only a scattering were men (except for the friars themselves who are always very good about listening politely to everyone), there was a higher percentage of young persons than at previous deliberations, and many more were non-Catholics and non-Religious. It seemed now that the tone of the discussions was set by those who were making the revolution rather than by those seeking, from the elevation of their years or their somewhat majestical "counseling" postures, to understand it.

Over dinner the first evening, theories were advanced about why the numbers attending had fallen off: the 22-inch snowstorm in New York State the week before had frightened people off the roads; most active, young or theoretically-concerned persons were too busy *being* liberated to discuss it further; the sexual revolution has gone as far as it will be permitted to go, and the male backlash has set in.

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My own explanation for the small attendance is, on the one hand, somewhat simpler and, on the other, more complex. First, it seems obvious that extensions or replays of once-highly-successful meetings are always doomed to diminution, in the same way that sequel movies (*Son of Monte Cristo*) and novels (*Tom Sawyer Abroad*) have been. But more than this, I suspect that in broadening the base and the terms of the sexual revolution, even to the point of questioning the sanctity of heterosexuality, some of the lightly-committed, the camp followers of any "new" movement, the curious, or the only-mildly sympathetic summer patriots, have moved back and away, and left the field to the real warriors. It was they who, in the main, made up the seminar-sized gathering this time.

From the early-morning prayer service on the second day it was clear where indeed it (the sexual revolution, the church) and they (women) are now. At the cocktail party the night before, a few women had written a revised Taizé Morning Service. It was presided over by a young Presbyterian minister, Jean Henderson, who has two small churches in Butler, Pa. Into her readings, and our responses, were incorporated the new pronominal switch, no hesitation, embarrassment, or the old titters:

> Sing unto God a new song
> for She has done marvelous things.
> God has declared Her Salvation
> and Her justice to women of all nations.

The homily was given by a superbly liberated Mercy nun in her middle 50s, Mary Flora Loan of Providence, R.I., whose words were autobiographic ("The first bug to bite me was the resignation of Bishop Kelly") as well as touching, because she saw the nun as the most suppressed of women in the modern world ("We want a *woman* on the committee, not a nun," a priest said recently to her). The prayers at the service were for persecuted women everywhere, "hated, ignored, or alone, tired, overworked, discouraged: may God protect and keep in Her love all those . . ."

The grammatical denomination having once and for all been overcome, the group went to hear Rosemary Ruether who is rapidly assuming the role of leading theoretician and historian of the women's revolution. Expanding upon her article in a recent *Cross Currents* (Spring 1971) and drawing upon research for a new book she is now writing, she traced the historical roots of the modern world-view of women, the "world-rejecting salvation myths of apocalypticism and Platonism." To her, the implications of the women's revolution are "nothing less than a transformation of all the social structures of civilization. . . . Such a revolution points forward to a new messianic epiphany . . . a salvation myth not of divinization and flight from the body but humanization with the earth."

It is hard to summarize the tightly organized thought of a mind like Rosemary's Ruether's. Let me quote directly a paragraph or so of her conclusions:

> We seek a new fusion of spirit and body that can bring upon man's humanization all the powers which he has won through his world-transcending élan. Our model is neither that of the romanticized primitive jungle, nor the modern technological wasteland. Rather it expresses itself in a new command to learn to cultivate the garden, for the cultivation of the garden is where the powers of the rational consciousness come together with the harmonies of nature in partnership . . .
>
> The revolution of the feminine revolts against the denatured Babel of concrete and steel that obliterates the living soil. But it does not merely reject the spirit-child born from the earth, but seeks to reclaim spirit for body and body for spirit in a messianic epiphany of the Body of God.

Following these prophecies, a surprising "opening up" or "out" of the participants occurred. The inevitable challenges were made: where are we now, where are we heading? Responses: day-care centers, yes, of course. The absolute necessity of continuous consciousness-raising sessions in which to gather strength and support, for women without men present, yes. A complete rejection of the patriarchic power-structure, yes (a bumper sticker now in circulation reads: BIG SISTER IS WATCHING YOU).

But, at the last, experiences were exchanged, and awarenesses expressed, which made it clear that women are now able to entertain the notion of true freedom in sexual concepts, to transcend stringent definitions and prejudices in order to reach the place where personhood of the other is defined in freer terms. Heads nodded as one speaker confessed to having reached this point after a realization that the social strictures against homosexuality kept him from full-realization of both himself and his wife. A few remembered that in Christ there were neither male nor female, that we are, in our inner knowledge of ourselves, both male and female, and that at the very start, in Genesis 1 it was "male and female He created them, in His image." On that original and delicate note all packed up and went to their cars.

DORIS GRUMBACH

(Doris Grumbach, author and essayist, teaches English at the College of St. Rose in Albany, N.Y.)

NOTICE

In keeping with what has become common magazine practice, Commonweal *publishes no year-end issue. The next issue will be dated Jan. 7. To all our readers, our very best wishes for the Christmas season.*

THE EDITORS

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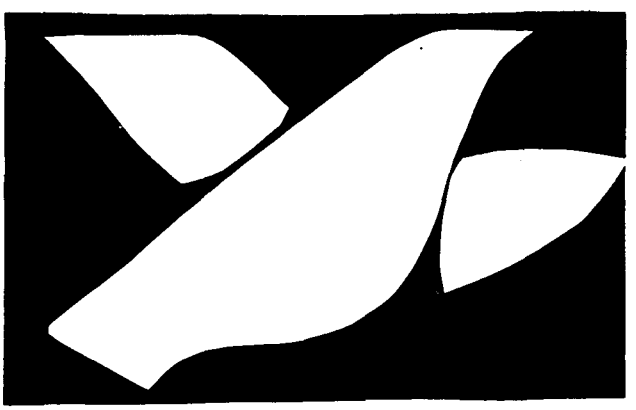
PEACE: GIFT & TASK

A PASTORAL LETTER

† CARROLL T. DOZIER



(Continued from front cover)

absence of war. That "nation will not lift sword against nation" (Micah 4:3) is only the beginning of the struggle for peace. The ultimate harmony of man with his fellow man, with nature, and with God is a long struggle against all the barriers of hostility, misunderstanding and self-assertion that separate us. We all look forward to the time when we can say, with Ezechiel, "The wall is gone" (Ez. 13:15).

The chosen People remembered the words of hope they had heard during their Exile. "I know the plans I have for you—it is Yahweh who speaks—plans of peace, not disaster, reserving a future for you" (Jer. 29:11). God will bring about that perfect peace when "the wolf lives with the lamb" (Is. 11:6), and "nations will hammer their swords into plowshares" (Is. 2:4).

Despite their yearning for peace, the Israelites found disruption, dispute and war. Their political fortunes were seldom very good. As Jeremiah observed, people spoke of "Peace! Peace! but there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14). The reality of their lives caused the Jews to believe the peace of full harmony must come in the future. It would be established by God through a Messiah, in a golden age when the fullness of life will come to pass. "Your sons will be taught by Yahweh. The prosperity of your sons will be great. You will be founded in integrity; remote from oppression, you will have nothing to fear" (Is. 54:13-14).

CHRIST BROUGHT PEACE

THIS GOLDEN AGE, we believe, began with the Kingdom of God which Jesus preached, a rule of God over the hearts of men. Jesus is the fulfillment in human flesh of our yearning. In him God and man are reconciled. "He came to bring the good news of peace, peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near at hand. Through him both of us have in the one Spirit our way to come to the Father" (Eph. 2:17-18). Jesus restored peace through the cross, united all men in a single body, and reconciled us with God (Eph. 2:15).

In him we are each reconciled with our neighbor. He brought down the walls that separate us from each other. "There are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28-29).

THE WORLD TODAY

By the help of God, then, peace is possible. The harmony has been made possible in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, born into this world on the first

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Christmas. But when we lift our eyes from the crib and look at the world around us we see not peace, but discord, fighting, violence, war, ugliness, oppression, fear. Fire bombs will be thrown in Northern Ireland this Christmas, and shots will be fired across the Suez Canal. Families will starve in India and Pakistan, while armies maneuver against each other. Black men will be jailed without trial in South Africa, more victims of *apartheid*. Desperate people in Latin America will meet secretly to plan revolution. Helpless people in Vietnam will be tortured and killed. In our own country, sick persons will die after being refused admittance into a hospital because they are poor or black. Children will suffer from rat bites and malnutrition. In our own city of Memphis, some people will enjoy a feast with their families this Christmas; others will tighten their belts.

PEACEMAKERS

Hatred came into the world with Adam and Eve, the Scriptures tell us, and quickly spread in the form of pride and greed and violence. Because we still see wars and troubles all around us, we are tempted to wonder if Christ really did bring peace on earth. I believe he did. "He is the peace between us" (Eph. 2:14) in fact. But he has called us to help make this peace a living reality for all men. As disciples we not only try to imitate Jesus' life, but we personally share in his power of reconciling, of making peace. "To all who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12). Our response to Christ means that we have the power to become peacemakers, reconcilers, and that we are able to communicate this power to others. "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you" (John 20:20-21).

Peace, full peace, will not happen unless we with Christ make it happen. This means lay people, clergy and bishop, all of us. The Christ whose birthday we celebrate this Christmas told us, "Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). All of us who accept Jesus as our Savior are called by him to *make* the peace on earth about which the angels sang. It is in each of us that the peace of the world begins. In the depths of our hearts. From there it must spread out to the ends of the earth.

We will see the peace of Christ, full *shalom,* only when justice reigns. We will see the peace of Christ when the hungry are fed, the strangers are welcome, the sick are visited, and prisoners are comforted (cf. Matt. 25:35-36). Now, in my first pastoral letter, I am asking you to consider one of the major obstacles to the peace of Christ, the international violence we call war. There are other aspects of peace which we will have to consider also, other problems of justice which prevent many people from living fully human lives. These are urgent, as recent events in Memphis have reminded us. But first I want to concentrate with you on the question of international peace. I shall again be talking with you about these other aspects of the justice that makes for peace.

We are aware that peace is the responsibility of all of us. We cannot evade our responsibility by leaving peacemaking to our political leaders. However late it is and however preoccupied we have been in the past, you and I must begin to act for peace now. It is not sufficient for us merely to talk about peace; we must change our attitudes and move into action. This is a large order. It is a great challenge. It will mean a significant change in our lives, as we see more clearly the ideals Christ taught us and realize how far away we and our society are from these ideals. But we can do it. We can make that change.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

The first public words of Jesus according to Saint Mark were: "The time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:14). Jesus, I believe, is speaking these words to us again today. He proclaims the kingdom of God here on earth. We must help fulfill the kingdom of God by reshaping our attitudes towards peace according to the spirit of Christ. If we have any doubts as to what this spirit is, we can clarify our vision by looking again at the words and actions of Christ in the Gospels.

We read in the Sermon on the Mount, "You have learnt how it was said: 'You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:43-44). This is the most difficult command that Christ has given us, to love our enemies. What does it mean? Should we not strike back and defend ourselves against them? Again, the Sermon on the Mount: "You have learnt how it was said: 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I say this to you: offer the wicked no resistance. But on the contrary, if any one hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well" (Matt. 5:38-39).

Although Jesus did not deliberately seek to be killed, he lived up to his own words when he was arrested, and refused to defend himself. He told Peter, who had already gone into action in his defense, "Put

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BISHOP CARROLL T. DOZIER *was a priest of the Diocese of Richmond, until being installed last January as first Bishop of Memphis. The accompanying text is that of a pastoral letter addressed to Catholics of the Memphis diocese.*

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your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Jesus was bound, mocked, scourged, spit upon, and finally executed. Through it all he showed no bitterness or hatred. He prayed for his persecutors, "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

The spirit of love which characterized Jesus' life is the ideal to which he calls all of us, even in the face of the many pressures and provocations in which we live. As the American Catholic bishops said in their Pastoral Letter in 1968, the spirit of the Gospel "is at heart a doctrine of non-violence rather than violence."

PEACE AND THE CROSS

The price of peace, then, is our own self-restraint, our own turning of the cheek, walking two miles with those who force us to walk one with them (Matt. 5:41). We cannot forget that peace and reconciliation with God brought Christ to the cross. He refused to fight back against his enemies, and he suffered. When Jesus appeared to his disciples and said, "Peace be with you," he showed them his hands and his side, scarred from his horrible suffering on the cross (John 20:20-21). We will begin to be peacemakers when we too are ready to suffer and die with Christ. Peacemaking will scar us as it did him. The cross was the outcome of Christ's non-violent life, a life of loving his enemies, of refusing to return evil for evil. But the cross was followed by the victory of the resurrection: God's blessing upon his life. We can suffer and die with him because we believe we will also rise with him.

THE EARLY CHURCH

The first followers of Christ understood what he meant. They tried to live according to his teachings, and they refused to defend themselves when they were persecuted. Saint Paul expressed the theme which motivated their actions when he said, "Never repay evil for evil, but let everyone see that you are interested only in the highest ideals. . . . Resist evil and conquer it with good" (Rom. 12:17, 21). These early Christians were generally unwilling to take part in the military activities of the Roman Empire. For a while many of them thought Christ would be coming again soon, and this world would pass away. But even after they had begun to realize that the Second Coming was not imminent, they knew that the Christian law of love called them to peace. Killing, they felt, even in war, was incompatible with this law. As Saint Justin Martyr in the 2nd century expressed it, "We who were filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness have each of us in all the world changed our weapons of war, swords into plows and spears into agricultural implements."

The early Christians believed, with Tertullian, that "Christ, in disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier." As members of a minority religious sect Christians in the first three centuries, like the Jews, were usually not forced to enter the Roman army. But even when they were, they frequently chose to suffer the consequences rather than fight. When a Roman spokesman complained that the Christians were shirking their civic responsibilities by refusing to serve in the army, the Christian theologian Origen replied, "We do our ruler better service than do those who bear the sword. Truly we do not go with him into the battlefield, not even if he commands it. But we fight for him in our camp of holiness, wherein we pray to God."

For several centuries these early followers of Christ believed that the spiritual power of prayer was stronger than the physical power of the sword. They acted courageously on that belief, remembering what Saint Peter had said after one of his arrests, "Obedience to God comes before obedience to men" (Acts 5:29).

THE JUST WAR

THE CHRISTIAN church faced a new situation after the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 4th century granted freedom of worship. Christians came to be part of the political and social life of the Empire. They began to be concerned that if Rome fell the Church would fall also, or at least lose the tremendous gains it had made. The progress of the Church was thought to be linked with political stability. Rome therefore had to be defended when it was threatened by barbarian invasions.

Saint Augustine in the early years of the 5th century was the first theologian to explain the conditions under which a war was justified and Christians could legitimately fight in it. One could love his enemy and still kill him. In fact, said Saint Augustine, a Christian soldier ought not to kill his enemy unless he did love him. But a Christian, as a private individual, did not have the right to defend his own life, said Saint Augustine. He was supposed to turn the other cheek, as Christ has commanded. The ideal of the Gospel was still strong, as Saint Augustine and his fellow Christians tried to respond to the demands of their time in the spirit of Christ. They knew that killing was wrong, but they thought that a threat to the Roman Empire was a threat to the Church, and they felt it might be permissible for a Christian to kill in defense of the faith.

During the Middle Ages the Church became so deeply involved with the political situation that it accepted war as a legitimate instrument of public pol-

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Many Catholics came to this country from Europe in the 19th century to escape compulsory military service in their native lands.

icy. The Popes had armies themselves, and occasionally the Holy Father would lead his troops in battle. But the Church sometimes felt uneasy in this. Church authorities at times imposed a penance for Christians killing anyone in war. It seemed necessary to go to war, yet it was wrong to kill.

Saint Thomas Aquinas considered war to be opposed to charity. He tried to show, though, that it was not *always* a sin. Sometimes war could be justified, he taught. This happens when it is commanded by legitimate authority, when it is fought for a just cause, and when those who fight do so with a good intention. This meant that war could be only a last resort, after all other means of solving the dispute had failed. It also meant that those on the other side who were not guilty of any wrong must be spared, and that the destruction caused by the war must not be greater than the trouble it was supposed to correct.

With his analysis Saint Thomas laid the foundation for a moral judgment on any particular war, making it possible for a sensitive person to judge whether or not he should fight. When all the conditions mentioned by Saint Thomas were fulfilled in a particular war, he felt it would be morally right for a Christian to take part in it. This became known as the Just War Theory, and served as a guide to the consciences of many Christians for centuries. In our times, however, modern weapons of war, such as nuclear bombs, atomic artillery, anti-personnel shells and napalm, with their wide range of destructive power, force us to shape a new attitude towards war.

THE CRUSADES

Not all Christians even in the Middle Ages were as restrained as Saint Thomas Aquinas. Christ's command to turn the other cheek and to love one's enemies were put completely aside during the Crusades. Christian soldiers had found an enemy on whom they could let loose the full fury of their desires. Those against whom they were fighting were infidels, enemies of God, they reasoned. The Crusades became a Holy War, and because the Crusaders were confident that God was certainly on their side, they did not hold back.

Once the spirit of war was aroused, it grew until the Christian Crusaders were killing almost without restraint. Some turned aside and massacred Jews in Germany. When they arrived in the Holy Land, Crusaders slaughtered many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The Crusaders' sack of Constantinople showed that they were as willing to kill their fellow Christians as they were to kill non-believers. The Crusades remain one of the most severe blots on the history of the Christian Church.

CHRISTIANS AND PEACE

But the Gospel spirit of non-violence remained alive in the Middle Ages also. In the midst of Christian enthusiasm for the Crusades, Saint Francis of Assisi not only renounced violence himself, but insisted that everyone who joined with him do so also. "They are not to take up lethal weapons or bear them about against anybody," he directed.

Although the Gospel message was never relaxed in theory, it was frequently neglected in practice in modern times as the Church often yielded to the rising tide of nationalism. Clergy blessed the guns on both sides as Christians fought one another in 19th and 20th century Europe. The Church's voice of peace had been largely hushed.

But some still refused to kill, and chose to suffer the consequences rather than serve in an army. Many Catholics came to this country from Europe in the 19th century to escape compulsory military service in their native lands. European Catholics coming to America to escape the draft in their home lands were welcomed by their fellow Catholics here.

We admire the courage of those few heroic Germans who refused to serve in Hitler's army even though they were drafted and urged to take up arms in defense of their fatherland.

Here in the United States our bishops until recently gave almost complete support to the public authorities in time of war. So many Catholics in the United States were immigrants that the Church was frequently looked upon as a "foreign" institution. The bishops were often concerned to prove that Catholics were not foreigners, that we were as American as anyone else. They took special care to show our patriotism, especially in time of war. It is only in the past several years, as our country has become more deeply involved in the ugly war in Vietnam, that some bishops have applied the Catholic teaching on peace in a different way and have spoken out against a specific war.

WORLD WAR II

Christian sensitivity was almost completely extinguished during the course of World War II. In our

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fervor to crush the warmaking power of Germany and Japan we American Christians tended to lose our perspective. We readily accepted the call for their unconditional surrender as the only legitimate solution to that war, even though it meant the killing of millions more people. Many innocent women and children died in Hamburg, Dresden, Berlin, Tokyo, and other cities that we bombed in our effort to break the will of our enemies.

Such indiscriminate bombing is clearly wrong. Catholic moral teaching has consistently maintained that the end does not justify the means. In no way can the directly intended killing of innocent people be justified. It cannot be accepted no matter how urgent the purpose for which it was done.

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the final atrocity. Most American Catholics easily accepted the direct killing of 200,000 people in these blasts as a means of ending the war. Our consciences had been numbed by the intensified destruction of whole areas by increasingly severe weapons. Pope Paul has rightly called the dropping of the atomic bomb an "infernal massacre," an "outrage against civilization," and prayed "that the world may never again see such a disgraceful day."

MODERN WAR

IT IS PRECISELY because of the immense destructive power of modern weapons that recent Popes have spoken out clearly and strongly against war. Pope Pius XII said that war as a means of settling disputes was simply "out of date," because of the enormous violence it involves.

In *Pacem in Terris* Pope John XXIII wrote, "In this age which boasts of its atomic power, it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice." And Pope Paul cried out to the United Nations, during his historic visit, "No more war, war never again."

The Second Vatican Council called for all men of good will to evaluate war "with an entirely new attitude." It praised those "'who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights." It requested all countries to enact laws which "make humane provisions for the case of those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms." The Council condemned acts of war which go against the natural law, especially "any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population." This, the Council said, "is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation." Orders commanding such acts "are criminal," it said. "Blind obedience cannot excuse those who yield to them."

The bishops at Vatican II labeled the international arms race, in which the United States and the Soviet Union are the principal competitors, "an utterly treacherous trap for humanity," and warned that it may lead to worldwide ruin. They called on all of us to work for international disarmament.

It is clear to me that each of these teachings of Vatican II applies to the United States at this time in history. They spell out part of the new attitude all of us must develop about war.

We must now squarely face the fact that war is no longer tolerable for a Christian. We must speak out loudly and clearly, and repudiate war as an instrument of national policy. We must be particularly clear in our attitude toward our nation's terribly destructive new weapons. *Never* must a nuclear bomb be dropped on a city, under any circumstances, including retaliation. This would be "a crime against God and man himself." Orders to operate these weapons against cities must be refused, because they are criminal, as Vatican II has taught.

We have come to this new realization after pondering the meaning of our bonds with *all* our human brothers. It comes as a painful shock to many of us to realize that we are no longer merely citizens of one country, but members of the international community of mankind. The interdependence of all people is made clear to us by the web of communications linking all parts of the world ever more tightly together. No longer can we be satisfied with actions of our government that are detrimental to our brothers in other lands. As Vatican II pointed out, "Today the bonds of mutual dependence become increasingly close between all citizens and all the peoples of the world. The *universal* common good needs to be intelligently pursued and more effectively achieved." We have seen how one nation's economic policies, the value of its money, affects the life of people in other countries. Local wars also today can draw other nations into them, like swirling pools of hatred that grow ever wider.

LOVE FOR ALL MEN

We Christians have our own call, which at times may well be different from our national self-interest. True patriotism demands that we love our country in the context of our love for all mankind. We want the best for our country, and the best must always be to contribute to the good of the entire human race.

"Profound and rapid changes make it particularly urgent that no one, ignoring the trend of events or drugged by laziness, content himself with a merely individualistic morality," warned Vatican II. "Let everyone consider it his sacred obligation to count social necessities among the primary duties of modern man, and to pay heed to them." As the meaning of

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The present American military action in Vietnam is not justified. . . . The only morally acceptable act on our part is to withdraw all our armed forces, and begin to repair the damage we have done. . . .

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these words sinks into us, we must take a second look, a hard look, at the priorities in our own personal lives, and those of our nation. Concern for our neighbor, at home and around the world, has to take precedence over military equipment and personal luxuries. We must reduce the amount of money, now well over half the national budget, that our government spends on "defense." Underlying our approach to this problem must be our conviction that true peace is not preserved by weapons of enormous destruction, but by fostering an attitude of trust among nations. "True and solid peace of nations consists not in equality of arms," wrote Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris,* "but in mutual trust alone. We believe that this can be brought to pass." This change of attitude is vital. We must begin to realize that the only really effective human power comes from love, not out of the barrel of a gun.

The possibility that the Christian approach might actually work has been brought home to us by the effectiveness of nonviolent action in the 20th century, such as Mahatma Gandhi's liberation of India and Martin Luther King's courageous struggle for equal rights for black people here in America. These examples of progress through peaceful action have been complemented by the dismay we have felt at the atrocities of Vietnam. These have been brought into our living rooms each evening on television, and into our hearts by our young men returning from Vietnam. They have shown us how dehumanizing war actually is. I believe the Holy Spirit is speaking to us in all these situations, showing us how to respond in a new way to Christ's message of peace.

VIETNAM

In particular we must stop the war in Vietnam. Looking back, we can see that Vietnam was more than a mistake. It was a tragedy. We fell into a sinful situation which swallowed us up. The present American military action in Vietnam is not justified, whether we judge it by the standards of the Just War Theory, or by the need to bring peace and justice to all men. The only morally acceptable act on our part is to withdraw all our armed forces, and begin to repair the damage we have done to that country.

We must not be lulled into a false sense of comfort by the present program called "Vietnamization" of the war. Instead of stopping the killing this program is transferring the instruments of slaughter into the hands of the South Vietnamese military and other Indochinese mercenaries. It is a program not for ending the war, but for continuing it with undiminished intensity. Nor must we be misled by assurances that the war is "winding down." All that is happening is that fewer American soldiers are being killed. Vietnamese deaths are continuing as before, caused by more intensive bombings by our warplanes, caused also by increasingly sophisticated electronic devices making possible even more devastating bombings and shellings. I repeat. The only morally acceptable course for the United States is to withdraw *all* our armed forces, stop providing the means of war for the Saigon government, and begin repairing the damage for which we have been responsible in that country.

THE TASK OF PEACE

Turning away from Vietnam, we see people suffering in many other places in the world. Some are forced to remain poor and are deprived of the means of bettering themselves by an unfair economic system which governs their lives. The conditions under which they live are a breeding ground for violence, for more Vietnams at home and abroad. We are reminded of the words of Pope Paul in *Populorum Progressio,* echoed again in his recent Apostolic Letter to Cardinal Roy, "Peace cannot be limited to a mere absence of war. No, peace is something that is built up day after day, in pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among men."

Our task, then, is wider than just stopping the war in Indochina, urgent as that may be. We are faced with the need to work for justice among peoples everywhere—in Vietnam, Pakistan, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, Latin America, Africa, here at home, everywhere—in order that true peace may spread throughout the world. We must, as the prophet Amos urged long ago, "let justice flow like water, and integrity like an unfailing stream" (Am. 5:24). I intend to go into this in much more detail in a second Pastoral Letter I shall be writing very soon.

THE PEACEMAKING task facing us is monumental. It might even seem impossible, when we reflect on the tendencies toward violence and selfishness deep within each one of us. We have strong instincts to fight to defend our territory, our

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property, our lives. But we are comforted by Christ's assurance. " 'For men,' he said, 'it is impossible, but not for God: because everything is possible for God' " (Mark 10:27). The grace of redemption given by our Savior helps us overcome the evil tendencies within us, helps us to go beyond ourselves in trust, willing to seek out other means than violence to solve our problems. "By this love you have for one another," Jesus said, "everyone will know that you are my disciples". (John 13:35). We are confident that the Holy Spirit of God will help us deepen and extend our love for one another, and encourage us to work tirelessly for that day when "there will be no more training for war" (Is. 2:4).

PRACTICAL STEPS

I intend at this time to take certain concrete actions in Memphis to help us move toward peace. First, I pledge my support to any young man of draft age who refuses to serve in the military because he conscientiously objects to war and killing. As the bishops of the United States made clear in their Pastoral Letter of 1968, and again in their "Resolution on Southeast Asia" in Washington last month, it is quite consistent with Catholic tradition to oppose war, whether it is the Vietnam war right now, or all war. I shall provide help for any young man seeking to formulate his conscientious objection to killing another human being.

Secondly, I am starting a diocesan draft counseling service, to provide adequate knowledge of the rights each person holds under the Selective Service laws. I am particularly concerned that those who are poor, or undereducated, have available to them the same advice and legal resources that more affluent members of our society have. I appeal to Memphis adults to volunteer to help in staffing our draft counseling center. We need persons expert in the law, but we also need everyone who is willing to help in any way with this project. Please let me know personally or by letter of your interest.

I am particularly requesting our priests to make our pulpits beacons of truth pointing to peace. Sermons must be given, and people presented with concrete guidelines for their attitudes and actions for peace. I agree with those assertions in the recent Synod in Rome that our people need to be educated for peace.

I am establishing an information center on peace, where persons can find the most recent as well as the most helpful material available concerning peace. Literature glorifying the peaceful, rather than the military, aspects of our history should be made available.

I urge those responsible for education in our area to make our schools instruments for reconciliation and peace. I especially ask our institutions of higher learning to establish courses on peace, where our young men and women can explore these questions in depth and shape their attitudes during the years when they have enough time to do this. Our colleges and universities should become centers for peace-oriented citizens.

I call upon all of you to write to our elected leaders and encourage them to end the Vietnam war immediately. I hope you will join your efforts with those who are working to stop the war, remembering what Pope Paul has already urged about Vietnam: "We call to them in God's name to stop."

I beg you to be sensitive to those who in conscience feel that they must speak out or take part in public demonstrations against this war.

I suggest that families this Christmas buy toys of peace instead of toys of war for their children.

I strongly encourage all of you to attend Mass on January 1, the World Day of Peace, and to take seriously the challenge with which our Holy Father, Pope Paul, has confronted us in calling for this Day: "If you want peace, work for justice."

OUR HOPE

The road ahead of us is long and difficult. Many of our friends and neighbors may not understand what we are doing. Some will oppose us, perhaps bitterly. In the struggle for peace the shadow of the cross falls across our own lives. We take up the burdens of peacemaking, remembering that Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light" (Matt.11:28-30).

So we are confident that the road we are taking leads to that peace on earth about which the angels sang. And we are confident because of the legacy left us by the Savior who was born to us. "Peace I bequeath to you; my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid" (John 14:27).

Our goal is as broad as the human race, peace on earth. The means at our disposal are close at hand, our own change of attitudes and our own personal action. "For this Law that I enjoin on you today is not beyond your strength or beyond your reach. It is not in heaven . . . Nor is it beyond the seas . . . No, the Word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance" (Deut. 30:11-14).

This Christmas let us pray with Saint Francis: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

May the New Year be for all of us a new dawning of the Peace of Christ.

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POPEYE AND THE MOLE

THE SCREEN

A few weeks ago Det. Eddie Egan, the New York policeman portrayed in *The French Connection,* was charged with failing to turn in drugs confiscated in the line of duty on 22 separate occasions. Since the Knapp Commission has heard testimony that narcotics agents sometimes used confiscated stuff as if it were S&H Green Stamps, trading the glycine envelopes back to pushers in exchange for appliances or other merchandise, the charges lodged against Egan are very serious. Egan himself has bitterly denied any wrongdoing, and William Friedkin, the director of *The French Connection*, has also been quick to come to Egan's defense. From working with Egan, who was a technical advisor on the film and played a minor part in it, Friedkin is sure that Egan is "absolutely incorruptible." But while there is no suggestion of legal or ethical corruption in Friedkin's film, there is more than a hint that the film Egan is not quite a right guy—maybe even not quite right in the head.

The film's shortcoming is that only in its final two or three minutes does Friedkin make up his mind about Egan, and by then it's a little late to develop him as a character. (Perhaps having the real Egan on the set intimidated Mr. Friedkin.) From time to time in the film there are insinuations about Egan's past. One of his partners even accuses him of having been responsible for a fellow officer's death. Through most of the film, however, Friedkin is having none of this. The character based on Egan, and expertly played by Gene Hackman, is called "Popeye" Doyle. And the nickname fits him to a T: he defends the public from master criminals with the same graceless energy that Popeye used to defend Olive Oyl from Black Bart. The opening scene sets the pace with Doyle tearing down a street at a dead run in pursuit of a pusher. Most of Doyle's time is spent just trying to catch up with his adversaries—tailing the French connection (Fernando Rey) on foot, or chasing a hijacked elevated train in a commandeered car.

In fact, Popeye is so intent on getting his man that he seems not to care when he accidentally shoots another cop to death in the last scene. Or was it an accident? The cop whom he has mistaken for the French connection and killed is the one who accused him earlier. In retrospect the whole film seems more interesting because of the ending, but what good is retrospect to a *policier?* It should have been this interesting while it was on the screen. As it is, the film left me feeling a little the way *Crime and Punishment* might if it didn't divulge until the end that Raskolnikov is a murderer.

The key to understanding *El Topo* is in the title, which signifies "the mole," and in Alexander Jadorowsky's prologue, which describes the mole's struggle to burrow out from underground into the light. As Deuteronomy says, Fulfill thy prophecy unto thyself before all others (or, Handsome is as handsome does). Therefore, for a year or more, or less, *El Topo* was condemned to the Satanic depths of space and time and money. He played only in the nether world of Manhattan, on the o'erdarkened lower West Side—below Hell's Kitchen, even as Ulysses had to play a gig in the refectory of Hades, below the brink of the world. *El Topo* then spent its wrath in the place of the repertory cinema, called El Gin. Moreover, it wandered abroad only in the depths of night, born back to life each day after the stroke of midnight, like a pumpkin reincarnated from Cinderella's coach. And the distributor fees were lousy: a mere percentage of El Gin's last show take.

But all the while *El Topo* burrowed mightily, not content to sneak-preview forever without hope of premiere. At last the lawsuit of constraint was broken on the wheel of cash receipts, and *El Topo* emerged from underground cinema to play the Forum—in midtown, in the twilight world of Times Square. Still *El Topo* claws his way up toward the sunshine of big money and continuous showings. In his next incarnation he will no doubt be seen on the upper East Side, basking in the matinee adoration of the manicured and rich.

Thus is told the story of *El Topo.* The story in *El Topo* is far more obscure and imponderable. It falls into two halves. In the first a *caballero,* played by Jadorowsky, liberates a monastery from bandits and then goes into the desert to face four nemeses, all of whom he conquers. At the monastery, however, he swaps his original traveling companion, a naked boy, for a bandit's woman. After his trial in the desert, this woman betrays him for a lesbian lover. In the second half an itinerant monk, also played by Jadorowsky, tunnels through a mountain to release a colony of cripples imprisoned inside. The monk and his female companion, a dwarf, degrade themselves in a nearby town to finance their work; but when they succeed, the townspeople massacre the escaping cripples. Enraged, the monk now revenges himself on the townspeople. The rest is silence—and more darkness.

If Luis Bunuel made a Western, and Sam Peckinpah did the second-unit direction for it, something like *El Topo* might be the result. *El Topo's* plentiful violence is explicit and graphic and unlike Bunuel, whose surrealism seems an obvious model for Jadorowsky's, Jadorowsky himself is meticulous about special effects. This is anything but an improvement on Bunuel, however. *El Topo* is an attempt to combine the ultra-realistic with the super-real, but in the end these competing aesthetics seem only to have canceled out each other's effects. Where Bunuel's films are grotesque and mystifying, Jadorowsky's *El Topo* seems merely gross and pretentious.

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WHY KEEP ON CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS?

JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP

WHY KEEP on celebrating Christmas? For one thing, Christ was not born on December 25. This date in the Christian calendar goes back no further than the fourth century when it was taken over from the Roman civil calendar. For the Romans at that time December 25 was the birthday of Mithra, the Unconquered Sun, patron of the imperial army. It was the day following the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. It is therefore hardly coincidental that both Mithra and Christ were represented as having been born in a cave; at least the tradition about the cave at Bethlehem cannot be traced back before that time.

We have it from the Jewish historian Josephus, born a few years after the death of Jesus, that Herod spent the last winters of his life in Jericho which had a climate not unlike that of Florida. In Matthew's birth-story, however, he is obviously living in Jerusalem which would suggest that Jesus was *not* born during the winter. The old French carol which speaks of shepherds coming from "flowery fields in May" may therefore be not so far off the mark. Mention of Herod reminds us that Jesus was not born in 1 A.D. either. Herod died in 4 B.C. which means that, if the Gospels have got it right, he could not have been born after that date. We owe our calculation of time to an obscure Russian monk called Denis the Little who lived in Italy is the sixth century and was out by several years in his calculations.

What of the star which led the Magi to Bethlehem? Some have suggested that it may have been Halley's comet which crosses the sky every seventy-six years and which, it is calculated, would have been visible around 12 B.C. Kepler was convinced, however, that what the Magi saw was the conjunction in the Sign of the Fish of the planets Venus, Jupiter and Saturn. This phenomenon, known as the *coniunctio magna*, produces an area of extraordinary brilliance but unfortunately happens only at intervals of seven hundred and ninety-four years. Kepler himself saw it and defended his hypothesis in a best-seller of 1606 entitled *De Stella Nova*. There are also references to it in ancient Chinese writings and among the Babylonians who were able, apparently, to predict it in advance. Kepler calculated that it would have been visible in 7 B.C. and some modern scholars have been impressed by his arguments.

Perhaps the most original suggestion is that of Immanuel Velikovsky, author of *Worlds in Collision*. He seems to believe that what the Magi saw was a spaceship bringing Jesus, an extra-terrestrial being, to this planet.

Interesting as they may be, all of these theories miss the mark. In the light of what we know today of Jewish exegesis at that time we would be obliged to read the birth- and infancy-stories as the bearers of a symbolic rather than historical and factual truth. They are, of course, midrash, a form of writing which makes abundant use of biblical lore and lays great emphasis on biblical parallels not always easily accessible to us today. We know, for example, that the prophecy of Balaam in the Book of Numbers chapter 24, which speaks of a star rising from Jacob, was very popular at the time of Christ. We also know, from the Dead Sea Scrolls, that *The Star* was one of many titles for the Messiah. The leader of the last Jewish revolt against Rome, bloodily suppressed in 135 A.D., was called Simon Son of the Star, and a star appears on coins minted in his honor which have recently come to light.

Much learned speculation has also gone into the visit of the Wise Men from the East. The Gospel does not tell us how many there were but later tradition has supplied the number to fit the three gifts offered. Since popular tradition abhors anonymity they acquired the names Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar, as well as a splendid tomb behind the high altar of Cologne Cathedral. While these details obviously belong to legend, the biblical story itself was inspired by certain prophetic passages about kings coming from the East to worship in Jerusalem, the center of the new creation. Here too, therefore, the "truth" of the story lies at a different and deeper level from that of factuality.

Can we even be certain that Jesus was born in Bethlehem? The Gospel of John, which recent research has taught us to take seriously as a source of ancient tradition, knows nothing about a birth in Bethlehem. It would suggest, if anything, that Jesus was born in an obscure Galilean village. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" asks Nathaniel. "Is the Messiah to come from Galilee?" ask the Jews who opposed Jesus; "has not the Scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem?" This last question would suggest the most obvious reason why the parents of Jesus had to be brought to Bethlehem for the birth of their child.

As said earlier, the cave at Bethlehem was first "discovered" in the fourth century. Pilgrims seem to have had a marked *penchant* for caves at that time (others are on the Mount of Olives and at Nazareth), thus occasioning the remark of a later pilgrim, Evelyn Waugh, about the trogloditic tendencies of the Holy Family. As for the ox, ass and manger, they appear for the first time in Saint Francis of Assisi's hometown in the year 1224.

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Does this mean that when we subtract the legend and myth there is nothing left of the Christmas festival? Not at all. For one thing, historical factuality by no means exhausts its meaning for the Christian attuned to the symbolic meaning. And beyond any purely Christian perspective, we *need* the story of the marvelous birth as a focus for memories of our own childhood, a periodic return to a world easily lost, a world where the marvelous can and does happen, where the heavens open, angels sing Hosanna, animals do homage to the Divine Child and kings dressed in oriental splendor follow a star moving across the cold sky. And perhaps, beyond even the reach of childhood memories, there is in the cave with its mother and child a return to the cosmic and psychic center, a whispered promise of a new birth and new life.

OUR PROBLEM with Christmas today doesn't lie with these primary symbols but with a whole second-order, degenerate mythology which has overgrown and smothered them, nowhere more obviously and painfully than in this country. It is hardly accidental that Santa Claus, the jolly red giant of the department store, is the distinctive American contribution to the celebration of the festival. By the time he made his debut, in the sketches of Thomas Nast during the 1850s, the commercialization of Christmas was well under way and the New York papers had been carrying advertisements for Christmas gifts for at least thirty years. Nast's picture was a composite of different elements. Years earlier, the New York Dutch had brought with them their devotion to Saint Nicholas, the fourth century bishop and patron of children, whose Phrygian miter explains the floppy cap worn by Santa Claus. To the good bishop were added some of the traits of Dickens' Ghost of Christmas Past in *A Christmas Carol* which came out in 1843 and was an instant best-seller in America. The same novel, incidentally, inspired many of the motifs on Christmas cards which began to appear in England in the following decade and made their American debut in Boston in 1875. And to compound confusion, Good King Wenceslaus first looked out in 1853, in the famous and popular carol of the Anglican clergyman, J. M. Neale.

The amorphous, hermaphroditic and corpulent figure created out of this mishmash may perhaps tell us something about our societal attitudes and therefore about ourselves. Historically, the figure of Nicholas probably owed a good deal to the Roman god Saturn who presided over the midwinter revels (the *Saturnalia*) held in his honor in ancient Rome. Saturn was an ambiguous deity: patron of light and mirth, he was also associated with fertility rites and was therefore feared and shunned by the good Christian folk of that time. This sinister aspect was preserved by "Old Nick" of the mummers' plays which toured the country towns and villages of England to the end of the last century. In Holland—and elsewhere in Europe—the ambiguity was resolved in an interesting way. The good bishop went his rounds on December 5 distributing gifts, but close behind him there followed a black servant with a switch to punish the children who had not behaved during the year which was ending.

As for the American version of Nicholas-Saturn, all the sinister and ambiguous features were washed away during the transatlantic crossing. There could be nothing fearful or ominous or potentially uncontrollable about him and, naturally, no black shadow following in his footsteps. All that was left, therefore, was a Sugar Daddy, a dressed-up phony placed on display, a little earlier each year, in the interests of the consumer-syndrome.

What is to be done? It is obviously impossible to abolish Christmas. They tried that in Massachusetts back in 1659 but it didn't work. Sadly, the way we celebrate Christmas reflects the way we live. We are no longer able, it seems, to celebrate the rites of earth, the wonders of the recurring seasons, the annual rebirth of the sun, no more than we are able to celebrate the Christmas calendar. But let Christmas remain at least as a reproach, a reminder of what we have lost and how much poorer we are for losing it. And maybe, since the birthday of the sun is also the birthday of the Divine Child, we shall also be reminded that only when we relearn how to celebrate the one will we be able to celebrate the other.

BOOKS

America First à la française

Without Marx or Jesus

JEAN-FRANCOIS REVEL

Doubleday, $6.95

VICTOR C. FERKISS

When *Without Marx or Jesus* was first published in France it caused a considerable stir. This was hardly surprising given that the book is a direct attack upon some of the most cherished prejudices of the French, especially the French intelligentsia, a group essentially provincial and out of touch with the realities of the twentieth century world. It is Revel's contention that the necessary revolution—the one which will put an end to war, imperialism, poverty, inequality and intellectual and cultural conformism—can begin only in the United States, and in fact has already started here.

Much of *Without Marx or Jesus* is devoted to analyzing the nature of revolution and explaining why the necessary revolution cannot possibly take place anywhere but in the United States, a task which gives Revel an excellent opportunity to excoriate the current state of French culture and politics and the essential triviality of most French think-

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ing about both America and France. The revolution, he argues, cannot begin either in Western Europe, which is essentially dependent, both technologically and culturally on the United States, nor in the Communist countries, where the concentration of power in oligarchical governments makes a sham of any professed commitment to equality as a goal. He attacks the myth of a revolutionary "third world," pointing out that these nations have authoritarian governments, their leaders espouse the superiority of their own traditional cultures, and, most serious of all, they are incapable of transforming themselves into modern societies without massive infusions of aid from the developed countries, especially the United States, which first requires as its essential precondition, a revolutionary change of consciousness in the United States itself.

Revel is least convincing when he turns his attention to the United States. His information is not always accurate and his interpretations are often overly optimistic (though, as he himself notes, almost any country looks good as far as freedom and equality are concerned when compared with France). Most discussion of the book has focused on these aspects of his thesis. On how valid his estimate is that half of the American population belongs to a kind of counter-society dedicated to peace, racial and sexual equality, cultural—including, especially, erotic—freedom, and ecological restoration; and on whether this joint political, social and moral revolution can triumph without a violent cataclysmic upheaval by employing a combination of peaceful and marginally violent actions to take advantage of the greater openness of American political and social processes in order to carry the day. For this reason, considerable attention has been given to Mary McCarthy's afterword to the American edition of the book, in which she suggests, although in a remarkably mellow and balanced fashion, that perhaps Nixon and the hard-hats still have more power than Revel credits them with. Important and probably valid as such criticisms are, however, they fail to deal with the most serious flaw in Revel's argument.

Revel's basic difficulty stems from his failure to recognize the nature of the complications involved in creating the multiple, converging revolutions he envisions. He praises the present state of American life in regard to such things as economic equality, educational opportunity and cultural freedom as compared with other countries; but at the same time, he extols the counter-culture and those who reject American society as it presently exists. Contrary to Revel's contention, this rejection is not simply a matter of Americans' judging American society by American standards and finding it still wanting. For what is being called for by many American revolutionaries today is not simply more of the same but a change in direction. As Revel only dimly recognizes, all of America's apostles of change, while they may be headed away from what is, are not necessarily going in the same direction, and even less are they all marching to the same tune.

Following an extended and generally sympathetic treatment of counter-culture trends among youth and the liberated middle class generally, Revel himself suggests that if the counter-society grows too large the economic growth of the United States may slow down. Yet, as he also argues, American technological and economic growth and the use of it on behalf of the rest of the world is necessary—even given the global birth control he prescribes—for the abolition of poverty and inequality in the world. Thus he approaches but then recoils from the basic revolutionary problem of our time: how to promote world-wide equality and self-government while at the same time creating the social mechanisms needed to regulate and curb a pattern of economic activity which threatens, in the relatively near future, to imperil the survival of the human race itself.

There is not a single revolution going on in the United States but multiple revolutions. No one of them is even halfway to success and all face counter-revolutionary pressures from those who accept the legitimacy of the reigning death machine. Equally important, the revolutionary forces are divided among themselves politically and intellectually. Before any of them can hope to be permanently successful, they must first resolve the theoretical and practical problems of how freedom and justice can be reconciled with survival, rather than simply squabble over the division of the stores of a sinking ship. Despite Revel's provocative title, to do this they will require all the inspiration and assistance they can get.

Wyndham Lewis, Paintings and Drawings

WALTER MICHEL, WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY BY HUGH KENNER

University of California Press, $35

TIMOTHY MATERER

Since Wyndham Lewis' death in 1957, there have been few studies and only one sizable exhibition (London, 1969) of the works of this major but underrated British painter. But now Michel's book enables us to see the magnificent dimensions of Lewis' four decades as a painter: a career in which Lewis appeared first as a rebel, then as a defender of tradition, and finally, until blindness forced him to leave the field, as a champion of a new generation of British painters.

As Michel shows with unusual accuracy and detail, the tragic years 1914-1915 were nevertheless the formative ones in Lewis' artistic life. Lewis had belonged to Roger Fry's "stable of British artists' (this acid phrase is characteristic of Michel's well-aimed attack on Fry's influence) but soon quarreled over Fry's uncritical acceptance of Continental trends as well as over personal matters. Partly in reaction to Fry's Omega Workshops, Lewis founded the Rebel Art Centre, which soon enlisted the sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska and the poet Ezra Pound, among others, in an attempt to revolutionize British culture. Their means of propaganda was the violent periodical *BLAST*—edited and principally written by Lewis. Their movement, dubbed "Vorticism" by Pound, used abstraction in a radically

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This Christmas remember a child "on the verge of death"

"IT IS NECESSARY TO WAKE UP THE SENSE OF HUMANITY IN THE WORLD TO SAVE THE LIVES OF COUNTLESS HUMAN BEINGS ON THE VERGE OF DEATH."

—Pope Paul in his appeal to religious groups of the world asking for prayer and fasting on behalf of child refugees from East Pakistan.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the Missionaries of Charity are among those struggling to save the lives of the destitute newcomers.

The bulk of the 9,000,000 refugees from East Pakistan have fled to Bengal. With its capital, Calcutta, it is one of the poorest and most crowded areas of the entire world.

Catholic Relief Services is supplying food rations for hundreds of thousands of refugees, and in addition is shipping anti-cholera vaccine to stem an epidemic and tarpaulin as protection against the monsoon rains.

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new way and produced works that were as advanced and vital as any on the Continent.

When he issued the second and final issue of *BLAST* in 1915, Lewis admitted that the bigger blasts of war were killing the Vorticists' hopes for a revitalized culture. Lewis enlisted, served as a battery officer at the Front, and then became an official war artist. Lewis tells us that the transition from avant-garde to war artist was swiftly made: "when Mars with his mailed finger showed me a shell-crater and a skeleton, with a couple of shivered tree-stumps behind it, I was still in my 'abtract' element." But the very bleakness of such scenes exposed the damages of abstraction: "The geometrics which had interested me so exclusively before, I now felt were bleak and empty." After the war, Lewis began to perfect his draughtmanship and move toward naturalism. His writings on art insisted on respecting the physical appearance of things, guarding against the subjectivity of abstract and surrealistic art, and learning the lessons of tradition.

A culmination in Lewis' work comes, Michel feels, in the late '30s. Then the pure formalism of his earlier period and the faithfulness to external reality of his later lead to such great portraits as *Froanna—Portrait of the Artist's Wife, T. S. Eliot,* and *Ezra Pound.* But another peak comes in the '40s when Lewis acquires a new "freedom of hand and mind." Michel's attempt to sum up the meaning of this final period is also a fine summation of the whole of Lewis' career:

> Line and color, monsters and dancers, a large stolid cow, two caricatures fighting with sword and ax. Creation myths. The realm of death. Primal vision. Faces . . . His gifts were an extravagant visual invention and a metaphysical imagination informed by intelligence.

Michel refuses to take sides with the critics ("some welcoming an increasing humanism, others regretting a loss of stylistic or philosophical rigor") who prefer one period of Lewis' work over another. But Hugh Kenner, who contributes an introductory essay to the volume, prefers the '30 portraits above all. His reason is similar to the one that makes him think Lewis' novel *The Revenge for Love* (1937) is his greatest. In a study of Lewis' novels written in 1954, Kenner said that *The Revenge* was superior because in it Lewis for the first time reined in his violently satiric prose and presented an ordinary human being whom the reader could respect. The emphasis moves from the brilliance of the prose to the reality of the character. In the portraits he admires, Kenner finds the same new-found respect for the character of the sitter: "The painter's hand is now 'burying Euclid deep in the living flesh,' abstract design is now made to express that system of tensions and preoccupations the subject carries with him all his life." Kenner's analysis of the Pound portrait is a marvelous appreciation of this formal yet humanistic quality in Lewis' art:

> the head is solid, understood in three dimensions and stated without simplification. The iconography is casual and exact: a folded newspaper on the table beside the poet who had grown so concerned with newspaper events; three *objets d'art* . . . nothing but an art-world is visible—the man before us dreams, drawn into what he once called 'the obscure reveries of the inward gaze,' the posture relaxed, the face at ease but intent. . . . The mounting hair, the majestic forehead, the nose, restate one another's contours; the beard is not a disguise but the face's final cachet of authority . . .

Michel and Kenner greatly extend our understanding of Lewis' art, but they also increase our awareness of its mystery. The mystery is suggested in a passage in Lewis' *Time and Western Man:* "The material world must . . . be imaginary, and the very effrontery of its superb solidness and the bland assurance with which it is camped before us, should actually help us to realize that." Although Lewis insists on truth to appearances, he by no means concludes that these appearances are real. We sense this even in the portraits. The lines and volumes of the painting seem to challenge the reality of the sitter, as if the tensions they represent could take us to a deeper level of existence than the sitter inhabits.

This visionary quality led to some surprising developments in Lewis' art of the '30s and '40s. Although Lewis attacked the dreamy subjectivity of the surrealists and of James Joyce's later work, some of his own greatest paintings are dream-like scenes in which Joycean allusions to the sea and fish-like forms predominate. Michel merely notes that these dream-visions discomforted some of Lewis' more dogmatic supporters. Kenner, however, attempts to relate this romantic strain to the classical severity Lewis preached. Of Lewis' *Athanaton,* he writes: "No romantic indistinctness blurs the mysteries: no shades, no modeling, no cloudy forms compromise the starkness." This analysis tells us much about the technique of these paintings, but little about their imaginative source.

We need further study of the dream pictures and the fascinating dichotomies (or contradictions) they imply within Lewis himself before we fully understand his art. But this brings us to the major virtue of Michel's book. For those who care about Lewis, it is both a summing up and a new start.

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Responsible Freedom: Guidelines for Christian Action

L. HAROLD DeWOLF

Harper & Row, $10.

ROGER L. SHINN

To write a system of ethics in these days requires nerve. Harold DeWolf has the nerve. He is fully aware of the vogue—and the reasons for the vogue

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—of situationalism, *ad hoc* decision, improvisation, and reliance upon "gut feeling" in contemporary life and ethics. By deliberate choice he resists the vogue.

Why? Because he is convinced that "random, impressionistic, blindly traditional, or purely emotional ways" are not adequate for ethical decision. Because, also, he wants to avoid both legalism and irresponsibility in ethics and therefore seeks a set of "definable principles" to guide persons in the exercise of responsible freedom.

So DeWolf develops an avowed "system" of ethics. Rather than duck or dodge his critics, he prefers to take them on directly. Without embarrassment he sets up his structure so that it can be a conspicuous target for all who object: Part I is "Basic Principles"; Part II is "Applied Christian Ethics."

The first part of the book culminates in a chapter on "general principles of moral decision." DeWolf does not hesitate to relate these principles to the ethical tradition of natural law, although he criticizes the rigid prescriptions that have often characterized natural law ethics. His own thinking on natural law, he says, owes much to an interseminary course on the subject that he once taught with Charles E. Curran of Catholic University. The importance of natural law—as exemplified in the Declaration of Independence—is that it affirms significant "ethical truth to be discovered by human beings through rational reflection on experience." It results in deliberative principles rather than prescriptive commands. The principles, DeWolf grants, are abstract and regulative; they include such formal principles as consistency, such moral principles as altruism. They do not instruct people in what specifically to do, but they offer bases of criticism by which persons and societies can check out the validity of their ethical impulses.

DeWolf knows that people do not very often act on the basis of a process of reasoning from abstract principles to their application in decisions. He is himself a theologian concerned about Christian ethics. It is his belief that the "general principles" of ethics are "given flesh" in Christian scripture and tradition. Hence he follows each definition of a principle with allusions to its biblical parallels or illustrations.

If this system seems forbiddingly formal, its applications give great weight to empirical data from the contemporary world. DeWolf is as much at home with the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* and with the anguish of human beings suffering injustice or facing moral dilemmas as he is with formal philosophy and theology. His applied ethics deals with the classical areas of family, the economy, the state, and international relations as these raise issues for contemporary mankind. He also goes into the areas that have had less traditional attention: ecology, technology, genetics, and medical ethics. He is capable of conversation with a wide range of specialists in these many fields, and he is unafraid to make controversial judgments, calling for major changes in present habits and institutions.

DeWolf's style of thinking grows out of the philosophical and theological tradition often known as "Boston personalism." The tradition was originally rooted in the personal idealism of nineteenth century German philosophy. DeWolf is one of the contemporary leaders who have moved it in a more empirical direction. Personalism has always put a high value on human rationality, and DeWolf is more the devotee of reason and common sense than of paradox—although he knows that "dialectical tensions" characterize ethical decision.

Some years ago DeWolf undertook the major task of writing a one-volume work on systematic theology; the result, *A Theology of the Living Church*, has found a wide audience. Now he has attempted the parallel task in ethics. The two works are quite comparable in ambition and scope, in method and style, and in acceptance of the risks of the enterprise. In the present state of the church and of culture, there will be many who will maintain that both aims are impossible. This may be one of those ages in history when comprehensive syntheses are quite unrealizable. Perhaps men and women today must

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make forays into unmapped realms, directed by fragmentary faiths and guided by glimmers of light, doing what they can to relate unexpected discoveries to inherited traditions, wondering whether future generations will have more success in constructing a coherent interpretation of themselves and their world.

Yet those who most question the possibility of an enterprise like DeWolf's might be well advised to see how one informed and intelligent mind goes about it. At a minimum they may discover that those who most thoroughly reject systems of ethics are forced by ethical conflicts to seek some principles for sorting out their impulses and sensitivities. Since the most radical existentialists and situationalists (who may or may not be the same) rely upon more principles than they announce and imply more systematic schemes than they declare, it is useful to see an ethicist declare his principles and his system, exposing them so that all who will to do so may scrutinize them.

The Book of Nightmares

GALWAY KINNELL

Houghton Mifflin, $4.50

ROSEMARY F. DEEN

Galway Kinnell's *The Book of Nightmares* is partly an account of nightmares, partly songs or spells to be sung in time of nightmare, and partly perhaps, on the analogy of old dream books, a guide to interpreting nightmares. One interpretation is suggested in poem VIII: Each of us is a half self. If we are matched, we are mismatched, because we are moved by craving and accident rather than by a perfecting fate. You can see that Kinnell, like Yeats, has altered Plato's parable. But unlike Yeats, he reminds us that Aristophanes told the story at the banquet, and so it is a comic or satiric idea.

Another idea comes out of Kinnell's own myth, the root form of his poems and, like all myth, it can be analyzed but not interpreted. The power and, originality of this myth unify and sustain the variety and strangeness of the best poems. Poem VIII says that if we were complete, we would turn inward like hens who "incline their faces/ when the heat flows from the warmed egg/ back into the whole being. . . ." But we are incomplete, and the root form of these nightmares is the fear of being emptied.

This being emptied appears in many images. In "The Hen Flower" the hen in her death throes "convulses: ready or not/ the next egg, bobbling/ its golden earth,/ skids forth, ridding her even/ of the life to come." The speaker has taken a hen killed my weasels and lugged

the sucked
carcass into first light. And when
I hoisted
her up among the young pines . . .
didn't it happen
the dead
wings creaked open as she soared
across the arms of the Bear?

With a slight shock we recall that the borning child of the first poem "skids out on her face into light. . . ." When

they hang her up
by the feet, she sucks
air, screams
her first song—turns rose,
the slow
beating, featherless arms
already clutching at emptiness.

Repeated words (here *skid, suck*) and repeated images (being brought into light, being hung up, and the movement of something like wings) identify "strangers" across poems. The baby girl "puts/ her hand/ into her father's mouth to take hold of/ his song." Ridding him of (even while she represents to him) the life to come? Even the newborn child, herself a life from inside, is emptied of a life:

as they cut
her tie to the darkness
she dies
a moment, turns blue as coal,
the limbs shaking
as the memories rush out of them.

These crossed images also link in one continuous action what we ordinarily separate as birth, singing and dying.

Incomplete and turning outward, the speaker repeatedly moves to fill another's emptiness. This action links salvation and loss: Salvation, because the speaker has filled the tramp's empty shoes, his empty sag in the mattress and his empty "final postcards to posterity." Loss, because the speaker becomes the tramp, writes his postcards "in the absolute spell/ of departure, and by the light/ from the joined hemispheres of the spider's eyes," and assumes the wanderer's curse:

You live
under the Sign
of the Bear, who flounders through chaos
in his starry blubber:
poor forked branch
of applewood, you will feel all your bones
break
over the holy waters you will never drink.

But this salvation and loss do not form a paradox, resolved when one term subsumes the other. They remain at odds, a mismatched, ironically joined pair. You will find that word *salvation* where I found it, embedded in a term for the lost and the second-hand: "the Store of the Salvation/ Army."

I think the long, seven-part form in which all the poems are cast stretches a few poems beyond their substance or unity ("Little Sleeps-Head . . . ," "Lastness," and "The Call Across. . . ."), and some beyond their possibility of variety ("The Path Among the Stones"). I am also uneasy with the affirmations of some of the poems: "Let our scars fall in love," *"the wages/ of dying is love."* The advice the speaker gives to someone he calls Kinnell seems more appropriate:

Listen, Kinnell,
dumped alive
and dying into the old sway bed,
a layer of crushed feathers all that there is
between you
and the long shaft of darkness shaped as you,
Let go.

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Even this haunted room
. . .
even these feathers freed from their
wings forever
are afraid.

At least the first five of these big poems are stunning and beautifully unified. They move easily, articulating each minute particular, which tells itself and then, like the skipping stone, starts to run as it goes under, letting go its energy to the life of the whole.

The Tenants

BERNARD MALAMUD

Farrar, Straus, $6.95.

RODERICK CRAIB

Who would read a book about two writers—one a somewhat successful Jewish novelist and the other a militant black novice—struggling in an abandoned apartment building to finish their respective books? Who would look here for insight into the central problem of our times?

You would—or, if not, you'd be missing one of the best novels yet to be written about what it's like to be an American in the 1970s. *The Tenants*, Bernard Malamud's fifth novel and eighth book—others were *The Assistant* and *The Fixer*—is that good.

Malamud's real subject is the final conflict between the haves and the have-nots. This, in Malamud's eyes, is not a confrontation between the monied and the so-called disadvantaged but between those whose values are derived from the cultural establishment and those who seek its overturn. To focus on his subject, Malamud has chosen for the setting of his novel, a limited corner of the world indeed.

The Tenants is a book with a very small cast of characters, and it takes place in a very limited locale. Almost all of the action occurs in a sixth floor apartment at Third Ave. and 31st St. in New York. The central figures are Harry Lesser, the Jewish novelist who appropriately enough is saddled with the burden of defending Judeo-Christian cultural traditions, and Willie Spearmint, a black who identifies with "Blind Willie Shakespeare," and who would like to succeed in Lesser's terms at the same time he is proclaiming that a white cannot understand the experience and therefore not the writing of a black. A third major character is Irene Bell, mistress first of Willie and then of Harry, who hopes that the difference between the two men (and the distinctions between them) will go away if she refuses to admit that a difference exists. (Rejected first by Willie and then by Harry in favor of their books, Irene eventually goes away herself.)

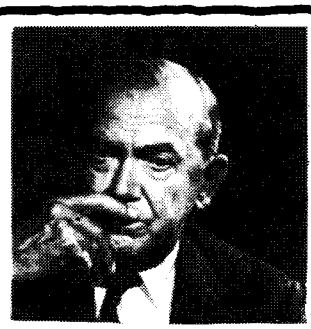
The Tenants makes much of Harry's Jewishness and Willie's blackness, but these are details rather than central symbols. Being a Jew makes Harry a good representative of the Western cultural tradition; Willie's blackness, although it is all he has, is less important to him eventually than the fact that he feels deprived at not having what Harry has.

The Tenants takes place in New York City, a place that is coming apart faster than most of the rest of the world. The setting is a building that is to be torn down. Typically enough, landlord Levenspiel who is pressing to evict Harry will replace the building with another very much the same. Harry, who as a rent-controlled tenant can't be evicted, wants to stay in the building to finish the novel he began 10 years before. Willie, a squatter, moves in because he can afford no other place.

The abandoned building has been for Harry a good place to work though he is unable to write the ending of his book. It is a place where he is not distracted by contact with the world. Willie's presence changes this. Harry is a man of good will and therefore must respond favorably to Willie's demands for help, although he is well aware this will hurt his own performance. "A guest forever is all I need," he muses one night. "What is this strange curse on my book that I can't get the right conditions to finish it?"

Willie's coming inevitably leads to a showdown between Harry's humanitarian instincts and his self-protective desire to subordinate everything to the need to finish his book. In the end it leads to the destruction of both men, an ending that has been criticized as unsatisfactory but which is essential to the central design of the novel. The mutual annihilation by the two writers, representative of the dominant forces in today's culture, is what the book is all about. Their confrontation is symbolic of the end of democracy, the death pangs of the Western world. If you are hoping for solutions, Malamud implies, you are a dreamer indeed.

The Tenants is a profoundly unoptimistic book. But it seems a true state-



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ment of an issue that has created the Attica prison riots as a counterfoil to the conditions that led to the burning of parts of Newark, Detroit, Washington, and Watts as well as other locations during recent summers. The confrontation will not go away simply because we do not like it.

Harry and Willie compete on two levels, as writers and as lovers of Irene, first Willie's mistress and then Harry's. Harry says of Willie who is driven to destroy Harry's manuscript, "I treated you like a man," but Harry did not treat Willie like a man, and the reader is aware of the problems this will create.

Harry's book is about "love," and Willie's book is about hate. We know that Willie knows hate but we doubt that Harry knows love. Both writers in succession desert Irene to work on their books.

Harry, the man of good will, behaves decently for a long time. He explains to Willie, when asked, about noun clauses. He stresses the importance of form in imposing order on content. But Harry's good will breaks down. When, after Harry has told Willie of his affair with Irene, Willie's friends want revenge and destroy Harry's manuscript, Harry has to respond in a destructive kind. First he finds and destroys Willie's typewriter. Later Harry and Willie meet and destroy each other.

Levenspiel, the landlord, representing the people who hope to make things work by putting bandaids on Attica and Kent State, finds the bodies at the end.

"Mercy the both of you, for Christ's sake," Levenspiel cries. "Hab rachmones, I beg you. Mercy on me. Mercy, mercy, mercy. . . ."

In invoking "rachmones," a term meaning compassion that Leo Rosten calls "a quintessential word lying at the heart of all Jewish thought and feeling" Malamud is asking for a sympathetic understanding of the failure of our civilization. But there is more to the matter than this. Both Harry and Willie, and we can assume Malamud, are driven by the demons of creativity.

Harry, saddled with the name "Lesser," never quite makes it, any more than "Blind Willie Shakespeare" does. But Malamud does. Overcoming his unwelcome forecast in the way artists have always done, he makes us welcome him as the bearer of bad tidings. A highly condensed book, *The Tenants* tells us far more through indirection and understatement than more discursive language could convey, but it does not coincidentally imply any easy solution.

Paradoxically, *The Tenants* is a happy book to read. It is alive and it sings. So then in the end, echoing *The Tempest* which took heart that the brave new world had fine people in it, perhaps Malamud suggests there is hope for us. A culture that produces as fine a work as *The Tenants* can't be all bad.

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 291)

write the book review in question, why does he protest errors made "about me" in the accompanying biographical note? If he did not write the review, then another Prattleback must have. Clearly our Prattleback is not his Prattleback, and while there could never be too many Prattlebacks, the question does arise whether Prattleback is really Prattleback or, as they said of Homer, merely someone else going by the same name.

THE EDITORS

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